

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT A 00930 152333Z  
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4336

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT AU PRINCE 0930

EXDIS

EO 11652 GDS  
TAGS: ENRG, HA  
SUBJECT: HAITI'S POWER SHORTAGE SERVES AS CATALYST TO DOMESTIC  
CRITICISM OF REGIME

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 0806

1. SUMMARY: HAITI'S SUDDEN AND DEEPENING POWER CRISIS (REFTTEL), ADDED TO ASSORTED ECONOMIC WOES, HAS SPURRED FRESH CRITICISM OF THE REGIME AMONG ITS PERENNIAL CRITICS (THE PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS CLASSES) AND AROUSED CONCERN AMONG LOYALIST DUVALIERISTS THAT PRESIDENT JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER'S GRIP ON POWER MAY BE WEAKENING UNLESS HE DRAWS UPON THE SERVICES OF VETERAN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LEADERS NOW EXCLUDED FROM PUBLIC LIFE. THE NEW MOOD OF CRITICAL INQUIRY, THE OPPOSITIONIST FEELING IN THE AIR, SPELLS TROUBLE FOR THE YOUNG PRESIDENT'S RULE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SEVERE (AND UNANTICIPATED) RATIONING OF ELECTRICITY THROUGHOUT PORT AU PRINCE, PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUED LONG-TERM WATER AND POWER SHORTAGES, INDUSTRY-WIDE REDUCTIONS IN THE WORKING DAY, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S BELATED, MAKESHIFT RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS HAVE AROUSED NOT ANGER SO MUCH AS DISGUST AMONG POLITICALLY SOPHISTICATED HAITIANS. CAPRICIOUS RAINFALL PATTERNS AND THE FACT THAT THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IS ALSO ENDURING DROUGHT CONDITIONS ARE ACKNOWLEDGED, BUT THE REGIME ITSELF BEARS THE MAJOR SHARE OF RESENTMENT.

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PRIVATE AND MEDIA COMMENTS CITE INEFFICIENT WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AS CAUSING THE PELIGRE RESERVOIR AREA TO SILT UP SO BADLY THAT A RECENT SPATE OF HEAVY RAINS COULD NOT BE CONTAINED; INADEQUATE CONSERVATION AND REFORESTATION ON THE PELIGRE WATERSHED AREAS; AND FAILURE TO ANTICIPATE OR TO CONTROL BURGEONING POWER DEMAND FROM PRIVATE CONSTRUCTION AND INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION.

3. THE PRESIDENT'S RECENT INSPECTION VISIT TO PELIGRE, INTENDED TO DRAMATIZE HIS CONCERN, APPEARS TO HAVE ELICITED A "TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE." REACTION, AND MANY QUESTION WHETHER HE STILL GRASPS THE UNDERLYING ADMINISTRATIVE DEFICIENCIES ACCENTUATING THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE FIRST QUESTION HE REPORTEDLY ASKED LOCAL AUTHORITIES AT PELIGRE WAS WHETHER THEY THOUGHT A "CONSPIRACY" AGAINST HIM WAS INVOLVED.

4. NOR HAS THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE IN OTHER ECONOMIC AREAS BEEN REASSURING RECENTLY: DOMESTIC RICE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION HAS PROVED INEXPLICABLY TOO MEAGER FOR DEMAND, AND IMPORTED RICE IS BOTH HIGH PRICED AND SUBJECT TO PROFITEERING. PRICES ON BASIC COMMODITIES SUCH AS FLOUR AND SUGAR CONTINUE TO RISE. EVEN BANANAS AND MANGOES COST AT LEAST DOUBLE WHAT THEY DID ONE YEAR AGO. RURAL/URBAN MIGRATION CONTINUES TO PLACE INTENSE PRESSURE ON HOUSING.

5. WE DO NOT WISH TO SUGGEST THAT THE HAITIAN CAPACITY TO BEAR HARD-SHIP WITH FORTITUDE AND EVEN SERENITY IS ABOUT TO SNAP. NOR--THANKS LARGELY TO THE CURRENT HIGH LEVEL OF INTERNATIONAL COFFEE PRICES AND INCREASED EXPORTS -- DOES THE GOH LACK IMMEDIATE RESOURCES: IT IS PAYING OVER \$2 MILLION FOR 5 TWO-MEGAWATT GENERATORS ORDERED FROM TEXAS WHICH SHOULD SERVE AS A PALLIATIVE UNTIL THE NEW IBRD-FINANCED THERMAL PLANT STARTS UP IN SEPTEMBER.

6. WHAT IS NEW, HOWEVER, IS A GROWING SENSE THAT AFTER 19 YEARS IN POWER TIME MAY BE RUNNING OUT ON THE DUVALIERIST REGIME. IN THE VIEW OF MANY, PRESIDENT JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER, FOR ALL HIS GOOD INTENTIONS AND A RECORD OF ECONOMIC ACCOMPLISHMENT THAT MANY A PAST

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HAITIAN PRESIDENT MIGHT HAVE ENVIED, MAY SIMPLY LACK THE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES, THE INTELLECTUAL CALIBER, AND THE MORAL FORCE REQUIRED FOR THE JOB. SOME OPPOSITIONIST HAITIANS, WHILE DEPLORING ANARCHY UNDER ANY FORM, WOULD WELCOME A NEW MILITARY/POLITICAL LEADERSHIP CENTERED ON THE RESPECTED CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF, LT. GEN. JEAN-BAPTISTE HILAIRE, AND MAY BE ACTIVELY WORKING TO BRING ABOUT SUCH A RESULT. LOYAL DUVALIERISTS, HOPING TO PRESERVE THE YOUNG PRESIDENT'S POSITION, ARE QUIETLY PROPOSING THE CREATION OF A COUNCIL OF WISE MEN (OR INNER CABINET) WHICH WOULD COMBINE NON-POLITICAL LEADERS WITH RESPECTED DUVALIERISTS SUCH AS 56-YEAR-OLD MICHEL LAMARTINIERE HONORAT, AN INFORMATION AND COORDINATION MINISTER IN THE EARLY 1960S. IMPLIED IN ANY SUCH ARRANGEMENTS IN THE ATTENUATION OF DUVALIER'S AUTHORITY AND, PERHAPS, HIS REPLACEMENT. THE ROLE OF MARIE-DENISE DOMINIQUE, THE PRESIDENT'S AMBITIOUS AND POLITICALLY SOPHISTICATED SISTER, WILL BEAR WATCHING, FOR WITH THE EXPULSION OF HENRI SICLAIT AND THE REPORTED DECLINE IN THE INFLUENCE OF NICOLE DUVALIER AND OF MADAME DUVALIER, SHE MAY FIND SUPPORT IN HER DESIRE TO RETURN FROM PARIS WITH HER HUSBAND, AN EX-PRESIDENTIAL GUARD OFFICER OF COMPELLING

PRESENCE. ROGER LAFONTANT, A PROGRESSIVE-MINDED FORMER ASSOCIATE OF DUVALIER NOW IN MONTREAL, IS REPORTED TO HAVE THE "POLITICAL ITCH", AND HAS EXCELLENT SOURCES OF INFORMATION IN THE PALACE.

7. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME, THE MOOD OF PERSISTENT, FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONING -- A WIND OF PROTEST -- IS NOT LIKELY TO DIE DOWN. THE CHURCH AND SOME ELEMENTS OF THE PRESS CONTINUE TO ANALYZE, IN TERMS ONCE UNTHINKABLE, THE STRUCTURAL DEFECTS UNDERLYING THE CURRENT CRISIS (ARCHBISHOP LIGONDE'S RECENT PASTORAL LETTER DENOUNCING CORRUPTION, RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY IN THE FACE OF POVERTY, AND PUBLIC IRRESPONSIBILITY HAS THE TOWN BUZZING). ENCOURAGED BY GOVERNMENT CHANGES IN OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND BY THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS, THOSE WHO SEEK RADICAL CHANGE ARE LIKELY TO BECOME MORE ASSERTIVE, NOTWITHSTANDING WHATEVER INTIMIDATION TACTICS THE REGIME MAY USE. HAITI'S CURRENT LEADERSHIP SEEMS HEADED FOR A TIME OF SEVERE TESTING. A SEPARATE MESSAGE WILL EXAMINE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SITUATION FOR U.S. CONFIDENTIAL

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POLICY INTERESTS.  
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